SWITCHBOARD FRIEND

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growing up homosexual

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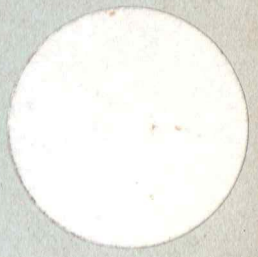


revised edition 1975

This pamphlet is written by a group of homosexual women and men. Our purpose is to make known the facts about homosexuality: what it is, and how and why life is difficult for people who are homosexual in this society. We will also try to show that people should be able to grow up knowing that they can have sex in any way they want without feeling guilty.

When people have sex with each other they do so for a variety of reasons.

1. It is a way of giving each other pleasure.
2. It is one of the most powerful ways we have of expressing our feelings for one another.
3. It is used for producing children.

The traditional emphasis is on the third reason, having children, and therefore on sex only between men and women. This has prevented people from seeing that the first two reasons, pleasure and feeling, are more important. There is a great deal more to sex than having children. No-one should feel tied to any one reason, nor to any one type of sex. We can all enjoy it in many more different ways than we are led to believe. We have to learn to accept and act upon our sexual and emotional feelings, for members of the opposite sex *and of our own sex.*

There are many books written about sex. Most of them talk as if it should only be between husband and wife; they give little information about homosexuality, and that little is usually wrong.

The people who know most about homosexuality are homosexual people themselves. In this pamphlet we concentrate on homosexuality because we want to make up for wrong and inadequate information, and to make everyone realise that homosexuality is a good part of their basic make-up.

EMOTIONS AND SEX

When you are young you laugh, cry, get angry, scream, sulk, kiss and hug. You show your feelings straightforwardly. As you get older and "grow up" you are expected to control your feelings, and this control can go too far. You end up stifling the good things, such as affection, along with the bad. You learn not to hit people, but unfortunately at the same time you find it almost impossible to touch people at all. You learn that you are not supposed to make a fuss about physical pain, and begin to find it difficult to express any feelings whatsoever, or to care about anyone else's. We build walls around ourselves to keep our own feelings in and other people's feelings out.

You are supposed to express emotion to other people only under special circumstances – marriage or a steady relationship. It is as if there is only one place for feelings between people: that is, when you are in the privacy of your own home, and not at school or at work. We all feel drawn to lots of people but are expected to express or act upon attraction only towards one person, a steady girlfriend, boyfriend, a husband or wife.

But to put all your feelings into one relationship has many disadvantages. Marriage, apart from restricting your emotional and sexual experience with other people, can also be very destructive for the two people involved. They are both going to have feelings for other people, even though society says they are not supposed to; but, since they are not allowed to put them into practice, they feel frustrated and resentful towards their wife or husband. The ideal of marriage is that both partners will be totally absorbed in one another, satisfying each other's every need. No-one can live up to this, but people are made to feel guilty that they can't. They take it out on one another, blackmailing one another into pretending what they don't feel. Relatives, friends, churches, society as a whole make you feel that you have failed if the marriage breaks up, and because of this you try to keep it going even when it's making both of you miserable.

Homosexual people are not allowed to marry and this, in fact, can spare them from getting into the kind of situation we've just outlined. Not having to get married gives us the opportunity of trying other sorts of relationships – for example:

1. A stable relationship between two people but one in which each partner feels free to have relationships with others.
2. More than two people living together sharing their lives in every way.
3. Having sex with lots of different people, giving each other pleasure in an open friendly way without either of you feeling that you have to have a permanent relationship.

Some people may be happier to live as a married couple but homosexual people shouldn't feel that they *have* to in order to be happy. Marriage is only one way of living together and you are more likely to be successful exploring those we have just mentioned.

PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF SEX

Unlike other sex education books, we've no need to tell homosexual people what their lovers' sex organs will be like, they will be like their own. The size and shape of the sexual organs are as various as those of other parts of the body.

In women differences in size of the clitoris and the vagina (cunt) have no effect on sexual pleasure. At birth there is a thin piece of skin across the vaginal passage, called the hymen. Everyday exercise or the use of tampons (see next section) gradually opens it up painlessly in most cases. If it's still there when you have sex for the first time, there is no problem if penetration is slow, gentle and gradual. The only time it could hurt is when it is done with violence.

Some men worry about the size of their penis (prick or cock), but it makes no difference to sexual pleasure. The only possible difference between men's penises is that some are circumcised. This means that the skin which covers the head of the penis (the foreskin) has been removed, for medical or religious reasons.

Puberty

Between roughly the ages of ten and sixteen the body develops sexually – this period is known as puberty.

At this time, if you have not already done so, you may want to start masturbating (see next section) and you may have sexually exciting dreams.

In males the penis and testicles (balls) increase in size, hair grows thickly around them and in the armpits, and the voice breaks. You are now able to ejaculate i.e. produce a white sticky fluid, called semen, from your penis.

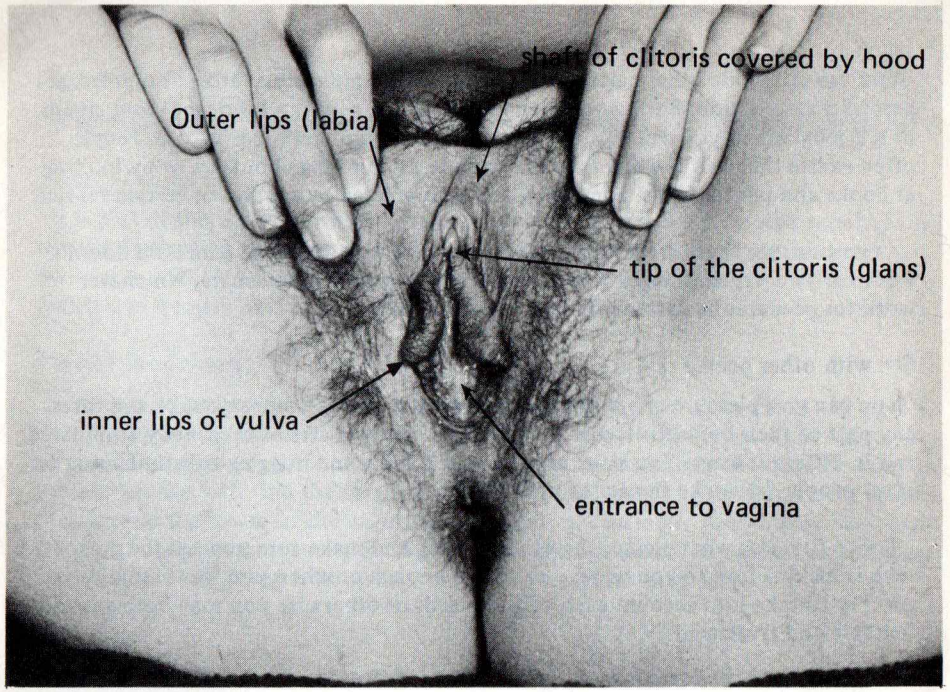
In females breasts develop , hair grows around the vaginal area and in the armpits. It may also grow in other places; no girl should feel embarrassed by this. Menstruation (periods) begin between the ages of eleven and fourteen; on average women menstruate for about four days every month – don't worry if your menstrual cycle doesn't fit this, no one's is the same. However, if your cycle is very irregular it might be a good idea to see your doctor. Sexual activity during menstruation does no harm at all; it's up to you and your lover whether you do or not. The blood you lose is not "disease-ridden" or "bad", it's merely the wall that builds up every month inside your womb, which is shed unless you become pregnant. To mop up the menstrual flow you can use sanitary towels (which are worn outside the body) or tampons. Tampons are small tubes of cotton wool which are put high into the vagina. Most women can wear these, even if they are virgins. You may feel nervous about putting them in first time, but there is nothing to worry about. They are much more comfortable to wear than sanitary towels, and they are completely safe. Many women suffer from discomfort before periods and pain during them. A fairly safe pain-killer is Paracetamol. Some women find that having an orgasm relieves the discomfort (a fact few medical experts mention), so if you suffer with your periods, try masturbating – at the very least, it will take your mind off the pain for a while!

Masturbation

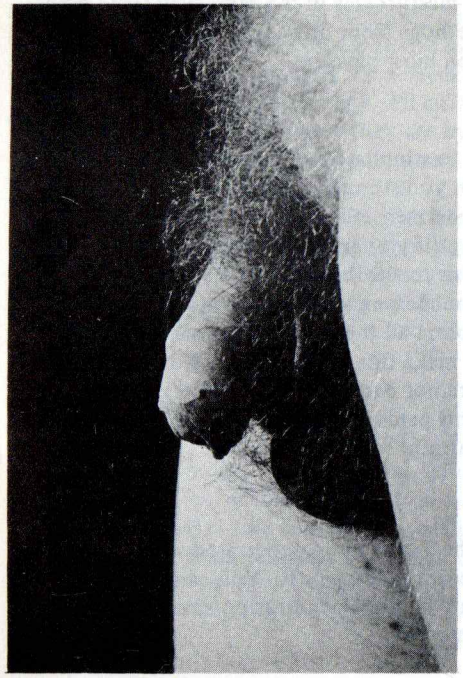
Most people get their first sexual enjoyment from masturbating (wanking). You often hear people say that masturbation is bad for you, that it makes you ill, damages your sexual organs, will make you unable to have children or to enjoy sex with other people, and is a bad habit which weakens the character. All these stories and any others like them are totally and utterly untrue. Never take any notice of people who try to put you off masturbating.

Even people who don't say that it is wrong, will say that it's just a phase which you should grow out of. But this is the wrong way to look at it; masturbating should be something you enjoy throughout life, as indeed most people do.

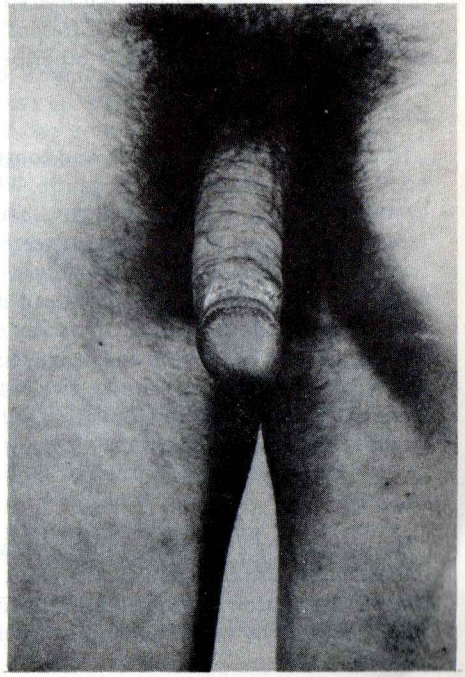
You masturbate by stimulating your sexual organs. Men masturbate by handling and rubbing the penis. The main sexually sensitive area of a woman's body is the clitoris. It can be lightly stimulated with the fingers by rubbing the labia (folds of skin over the clitoris and vagina) backwards and forwards or by rubbing the area immediately surrounding the clitoris. The mouth of the vagina is also sensitive, although the inside of the vagina is totally insensitive – most of the stories you hear about women having orgasms in their vaginas are just male fantasies. You can use a vibrator or other hard object to stimulate the clitoris, but make sure it is clean. This is a nice feeling and can lead to a particularly intense moment of pleasure, known as orgasm (coming) (in men, this is usually accompanied by ejaculation).



clitoris and vagina



uncircumcised penis



circumcised penis

You can stimulate other parts of the body, for example anus (arse) or nipples, as part of masturbation. Both women and men can use spit or a lubricant (cold cream, or KY jelly which you can buy at any chemist) to help them masturbate. People often excite themselves when they masturbate by thinking about sex or by looking at books and photographs. Some people are stimulated by clothes or certain fabrics.

As you can see there are all sorts of ways of masturbating; if one method doesn't work for you, try another. There are no "right" ways to masturbate. Whichever work for you are the correct ones.

Sex with other people

You can give pleasure to another person in many ways. You can stroke and caress any part of their body. Different people like different parts of their body stimulated and in different ways. You must experiment. Kissing and hugging are stimulating to most people, as can be the act of undressing.

Try to find out what pleases the other person; and make sure you tell the person who is making love to you when you've had enough or when you want them to go on. Try to take into account each other's needs or otherwise you may both get very irritable and frustrated.

Mutual Masturbation

The most obvious way of having sex with another person is for you to masturbate one another. Remember that not everyone masturbates in the same way (men who have been circumcised will use different methods from those who haven't), and try to find out which ways give the other person most pleasure.

Oral Sex

This means using your mouth and tongue to stimulate any part of your partner's body. Remember always to be gentle. When you stimulate someone's sexual organs (between women called cunnilingus; between men called fellatio) you must be careful not to hurt them with your teeth, but if you are gentle you can use your teeth to give pleasure. One person can do this to another or if you both face each other lying down head to foot you can stimulate one another at the same time. This position is called "sixty-nine". You can explore all the genitals and other parts of the body with your mouth and tongue and make this very exciting. Remember that any secretions your partner may give out are not bad or harmful. With men, if you stimulate your partner to ejaculation with his penis in your mouth you can either swallow his semen or spit it out, it is not harmful.

Anal Sex

The arse can be a sexually arousing area, the anus can be penetrated with a finger (men can also use their penis). This must be done very gently. You can use spit or creams (see section on masturbation) which will make penetration easier. The person who is being penetrated should relax their muscles.

Health

A general point is that sex is nicer for the other person if you keep yourself clean.

Vaginal Discharge

It is part of the body's normal cleansing process to produce a discharge occasionally to wash impurities out of the vagina. This discharge should normally be clear or white-coloured, and should not be itchy or strong-smelling. If you have a discharge which is extremely heavy, or unlike this, it is a good idea to see your doctor about it.

Vaginal Deodorants

Women's magazines are full of advertisements urging women to be clean and sweet-smelling by using "intimate deodorants". It is best to avoid these products like the plague! First, they are unnecessary – ordinary vaginal discharges are harmless and your lover may well find the smell attractive. Secondly, they are self-defeating since they irritate the inside of the vagina and cause more discharge. And thirdly, they are dangerous, as they can cause you to get an infection or nastier diseases. For cleansing purposes, the best thing is hot water and a mild soap like baby soap.

Infections

There are diseases spread by sexual contact, known collectively as Venereal Disease (V.D.). Get treatment as soon as possible, if you even only suspect that you've got it – because you have a pain in the sexual organs or an abnormal discharge from them or sores on them, or someone you have had sex with recently tells you they have it. The cure for V.D. is relatively straightforward and painless, but if left to develop V.D. can be dangerous. If you have V.D. yourself, get anyone you've had sex with recently to go along for a check-up; even if they have no symptoms, they may be carrying it unknowingly. All cities have special clinics for the treatment of V.D.; you can find out where they are by ringing your local general hospital, and you do not need a note from your doctor to attend.

You can also catch "crabs" through having sex. These are a form of lice which live in the hair around the gentials, although they can spread to other parts of the body. If you get them you can buy Quellada or benzyl benzoate lotion from any chemist; this has instructions with it. You should wash and iron all clothes, towels and bed linen before using them again.

OPPRESSION

So far we have dealt with the good things about being homosexual, or, as we prefer to say, "gay". We've talked about love and sex – but it is not easy to love one's own sex in our society. Life is made very difficult for gay people in many ways – it is quite possible to live a lifetime without all the things listed below happening to you, but some of them are bound to happen.

The Image of Homosexuality

One of the problems of anyone growing up is establishing their own identity or sense of who they are. If you do something, you like to know if anyone else has done it, what they feel about it and what *you* feel about it (not always an easy thing to know). Unfortunately, sex, and especially homosexuality, is a difficult subject to discuss with parents and teachers, who often discourage discussion of the subject. So you then turn to more general sources of information; people talking, T.V., films and books.

If you listen to what people say about homosexuality you will hear terms like "queer", "poof", "fairy", "nancy boy", "dyke" or simply "one of them" said sneeringly. All these words show contempt for gay people and are only used by people who know nothing about homosexuality. Because of this homosexual people have chosen the word gay to describe themselves.

Only one side of homosexual life is shown in books and on television, and one kind of homosexual person. Both gay men and women are shown as being interested only in sex. The women are shown as trying to be like men (butch) and the men are shown as being weak and effeminate. It's always the same image; radio, T.V., and books hardly ever put across the fact that gay people are as various as anyone else.

Psychiatry

The attitude of psychiatrists is often that being gay is a condition for which a cure must be found. They look for the causes of being gay but never question the reasons why people are heterosexual. People obviously develop in different ways. There is no evidence of any physical difference between gay people and heterosexuals. Many people, even gay people, say there is, and this is used as an argument for saying that gay people are not "normal", so it is important to remember that it is not so.

One of the so-called "cures" is Aversion Therapy. In this people are excited by being shown pictures of naked people of the same sex, given electric shocks, and then shown pictures of the opposite sex as a substitute. This may stop you from wanting gay sex, but it cannot make you heterosexual – it will just turn you into a sexless vegetable. People are seldom forced to have aversion therapy, but merely "persuaded" to have it. People who are prosecuted for being gay are sometimes let off lightly on condition of having it. It is important to refuse to have this "cure" under any circumstances.

Religion

When they realise they are gay, some people turn for advice and help to religious leaders, who do not usually know anything about being gay. Many religious teachings – Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam – condemn gayness and cause guilt and shame to gay people who believe in them. Do not allow yourself to be condemned for what you are. Remember that there are millions of gay people all over the world who live happily without believing that they are perverted or evil. If you are religious and gay you will have to work this out. However, there are a few religious organizations which will accept you for what you are.

Education

What sex education there is in schools and in books usually barely mentions homosecuality. It is often said that it is just a stage which adolescents pass through, and "normal" people get over. Even more often it is mentioned as a mental illness of which people have to be cured.

Even when not talking specifically about sex, teachers pass on attitudes against being gay. Although they are in a position of authority, they have less knowledge and understanding of your own sexuality than you do. Gay people often feel very isolated at school; remember that there are certainly other gay people around, both pupils and teachers.

Queer Bashing

The attitudes of society towards gay people are so hysterical that some people are influenced by them into feeling that it is right to go and beat up gay people. Parents and police, while they do not openly approve, do little to discourage it. People who have been convicted of violence and even murder of gay people, often feel no guilt, and say things like "When you're hitting a queer, you don't feel you're doing wrong" Queer bashers are encouraged by the belief that gay people will not fight back – you can do a lot to alter this belief by standing up for yourself.

Police and the Law

Some homosexual men use public toilets as convenient places for making contacts. The police know this, and often arrest gay men simply for being in there, even though they may not be doing anything. In England and Wales, any form of sex between two men is illegal if either of them is under twenty one, and in Scotland and Northern Ireland it is illegal whatever their age. Homosexual acts are legal if they take place completely in private and with only two people present – holding hands in the street or even dancing together in clubs can be classified as illegal.

Employment

It has been quite common for people to lose their jobs if they are discovered to be gay, especially in professions like teaching and nursing. It is not usually admitted that the reason for sacking someone is that they are gay. Another excuse will usually be invented.

The Family

Mothers and fathers find it hard to accept that their children are gay, and won't take after them. They feel that someone must be blamed for this "misfortune" and either blame the child for letting them down, or themselves for bringing it up wrongly. Gay children either keep their gayness secret, and find it more and more difficult to be honest with their parents; or, if it becomes known, they may be treated very badly or even told to leave home. It does seem however, that quite often where the effort is made to tell them, many do come to accept their gay children and live on good terms with them.

WHY SOCIETY OPPRESSES GAY PEOPLE

Gay people are oppressed because of the family set-up. The ideal state in our society is thought to be marriage and family life. This is because people are brought up to think that the only real way of having warmth and security is a family, even though it is often not the reality. Having grown up in a family you can't imagine any other way. The idea of a happy family life means so much to people that everything which goes against it is felt to be wrong and evil.

Gay people do go against it, in the following ways:

1. They don't keep the family going by having children.
2. Men and women are traditionally expected to play definite parts in marriage as in all their other relationships. Men are supposed to be the breadwinners, heads of the family, strong, in control of their emotions, and to have authority over their wives and children who are thought to be inferior to them. Women are supposed to be the home-makers, to be soft, emotional, and look after the needs of their husbands and children. In practice no-one exactly fits these stereotypes (which we call sex-roles), but people pressurise us to conform with them. Boys are brought up to be like their fathers, and girls to be like their mothers. This means that parents hope that their children will grow up to treat the other sex in the same way that they do. Gay children let down these hopes. Parents see gay children as refusing to follow in their footsteps; society sees gay people as refusing to have anything to do with the conventional way of treating the opposite sex.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

1. Perhaps the most important thing is for each gay person to come to terms with their homosexual feelings. This is not easy because of the oppression that we suffer, but despite this thousands upon thousands of gay people have done it. Very often help is needed, and the people who are going to know most about the way you feel are other gay people. It is much easier to come to terms with your gayness if you have help from other gay people, but it is something that you really only can do yourself.

2. There are many pubs and clubs throughout the country, and organizations that will help gay people, especially in the larger cities. The best way of finding out about these is to get hold of a copy of *Gay News* which is published fortnightly and which you can obtain from many newsagents or from Gay News Ltd., **1A Normand Gardens, Greyhound Road, London W14 9SB.** The other way is to get in touch with one of the Gay Switchboards in operation that give you information about your area, and these are listed in *Gay News.*

3. The process of "coming out" (living an open homosexual life) is not easy, but coming to terms with your feelings and then acting on them by making contact with other gay people are the first two stages. The next is to "come out" to family and friends. Without doing this you will have to live a double life and this will limit you and other gay people around you. If only all gay people "came out" then a great deal of our oppression would disappear.

4. There are groups of homosexual men and women which exist especially for gay people to meet one another, discuss, and organise action about the oppression we have talked about. One of these is the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (C.H.E.) Box 247, 28 Kennedy Street, Manchester 2. The other is G.L.F. (Gay Liberation Front) which, like C.H.E., has local groups throughout the country – you can find these listed in *Gay News.*

If you are gay and a woman, you will find that a lot of your problems in life (being sexually harrassed by men, being treated unfairly in applying for jobs and houses) are problems that are shared with heterosexual women. The women's liberation movement is trying to get rid of these problems, and also tries to offer help and support to women. If you live in a large town, there is probably a women' liberation group; you can find out from the Women's Liberation Workshop, 38 Earlham St., London WC2. (01-836 6081).

Many trade unions support gay rights as do some political parties; the National Union of Students (N.U.S.) and the National Union of School Students (N.U.S.S.) have gay rights campaigns. Find out if any organizations that you belong to have one and, if not, why not start your own?

This pamphlet was written by people in Birmingham Gay Liberation Front. We have an Education Group which gives talks to schools and colleges. We organize dances and discos for gay people as well as producing our own newsletter called *Gladrag.* We can supply information about local and national groups. We can be contacted via The Peace Centre, 18 Moor Street, Ringway, Birmingham. (021-643 0996).

Good Luck And Have Fun